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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000216

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2030

TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR KS

SUBJECT: GYEONGGI GOVERNOR ASKS FOR PREDICTABILITY ON BASE RELOCATIONS; URGES U.S. TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO CHINA

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Gyeonggi Governor Kim Moon-soo, introducing Ambassador Stephens before a January 29 speech in Suwon to some 250 business and political leaders from Gyeonggi Province, called for more predictability and transparency in relocating and consolidating U.S. bases. At lunch in his residence, Gov. Kim urged the U.S. to pay more attention to the effect of China's growing economic and cultural influence over Korea. He predicted that education policy would be a hot issue in the June 2 regional elections in which, for the first time, Education Superintendents at the provincial and city levels would be elected rather than appointed. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Governor Kim Moon-soo, from the ruling Grand National Party (GNP), has made no secret of his presidential ambitions and would be a strong contender. He is, however, considering running for a second term as Governor in the June 2 regional elections and foregoing the 2012 presidential contest. Though he has not made an announcement, his staff is gearing up for a gubernatorial run this year -- a move the GNP would welcome, as Kim would be favored to beat even a strong opposition Democratic Party candidate. His public frustrations with the pace and predictability of base relocations reflect the pressure he is under from constituents in both the losing and gaining base communities that have seen their redevelopment plans frustrated by delays. End comment.

Base Relocations

¶3. (C) Gyeonggi Governor Kim Moon-soo, introducing Ambassador Stephens before a January 29 speech in Suwon to some 250 business and political leaders from Gyeonggi Province, called for more predictability and transparency in relocating and consolidating U.S. bases. Gyeonggi Province, which surrounds Seoul, is home to the majority of U.S. bases in Korea. All of the bases north of Seoul in Dongducheon and Uijeongbu are slated for closure in the next few years. U.S. Forces stationed there will relocate to bases that are undergoing major expansions south of Seoul in Osan and Pyeongtek. In the past, Gov. Kim called for accelerating the relocation schedule. In his January 29 remarks, however, he said predictability was more important, because investors in the losing and gaining base communities had lost too much money due to the delayed relocation schedules.

China

¶4. (C) At lunch in his residence, Gov. Kim told the Ambassador China was the biggest influence on the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance and that managing the two relationships

was a difficult balancing act for Korea that required more attention from the U.S. The ROK, smaller than a Chinese province, had extensive economic interests in China, was geographically close, and had an increasing number of people-to-people ties. Nevertheless, he said, Koreans feared China, and the more influential China became the more important U.S.-ROK relations became. A strong, influential China "has historically not been pleasant" for Korea, the Governor said.

Education Politics

15. (C) Gov. Kim said education would be the important issue to watch in the June 2 regional elections. Education Superintendents on the provincial and city levels, who have been appointed until now, will be elected. The current Education Superintendent in Gyeonggi Province, who was elected in a 2009 special election as the first elected Superintendent, is a left-leaning opponent of education reforms favored by the Governor and President Lee Myung-bak. The Governor is in favor of competitive high school admissions policies and teacher accountability. The Education Superintendent, who has close ties to the teacher's union, favors free lunches in school and a more egalitarian admissions policy that selects students based on a lottery system.

STEPHENNS